

NCADD - Youth, Alcohol and Other Drugs

AN OVERVIEW

- About 10 million Americans between ages 12-20 had at least one drink last month; of these 5.1 million were "binge" drinkers (consuming five or more drinks in a row on a single occasion) including 2.3 million heavy drinkers (consuming five or more drinks on the same occasion on at least five different days) (National Institute on Drug Abuse {NIDA}, 1998 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse).
- The highest rates of illicit drug use are found among youth ages 16-17 (16%) and ages 18-20 (20%) with marijuana the most commonly used illicit drug (NIDA, 1998 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse).
- 80% of high school seniors have used alcohol; in comparison, 65% have smoked cigarettes; 50% have used marijuana; and 10% have used cocaine (NIDA, 1999 Monitoring the Future Study, Secondary School Students).
- Purchase and public possession of alcohol by people under the age of 21 is illegal in all 50 states (Office of the Inspector General {OIG}, US Department of Health and Human Services {HHS}, "Youth and Alcohol: Laws and Enforcement: Is the 21-Year-Old Drinking Age a Myth?," 10/91).
- Approximately 2/3 of teenagers who drink report that they can buy their own alcoholic beverages (OIG, HHS, "Youth and Alcohol: A National Survey. Drinking Habits, Access, Attitudes, and Knowledge," Washington, DC, 6/91).
- Use of alcohol and other drugs is associated with the leading causes of death and injury (e.g., motor-vehicle crashes, homicides, and suicides) among teenagers and young adults (Centers for Disease Control {CDC}, "Alcohol and Other Drug Use Among High School Students--United States, 1990," Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report {MMWR}, 11/91, p. 776).
- The total cost of alcohol use by youth--including traffic crashes, violent crime, burns, drowning, suicide attempts, fetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol poisonings and treatment--is more than \$58 billion per year (DT Levy, K Stewart, et al "Costs of Underage Drinking" {report prepared for the US Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Delinquency Prevention}, Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, 7/99).
- Use of alcohol or other drugs at an early age is an indicator of future alcohol or drug problems (J Hawkins, R Catalano, "Risk and Protective Factors for Alcohol and Other Drug Problems in Adolescence and Early Adulthood: Implications for Substance Abuse Prevention, 1989, p. 78) ; people who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcoholism than those who begin at 21 (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism news release, 1/14/98).

USAGE RATES AND PATTERNS

- First use of alcohol typically begins around the age 13; marijuana around 14 (NIDA, Drug Use Among Racial/Ethnic Minorities, 1995, p.31).
- People who begin smoking before age 13 are significantly more likely than nonsmokers and those who begin smoking later to have problems with alcohol and other drugs (E Hanna & B Grant, "Parallels to Early Onset Alcohol Use . . .," Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1999, p. 513-522).
- Among high school seniors, current use of alcohol is higher for whites and Hispanics than blacks; the same is true for marijuana, but with greater similarity in the rates of use (NIDA, Drug Use Among Racial/Ethnic Minorities, 1995, pp. 32, 34).
- Approximately 9% of the nation's eighth graders; 22% of tenth graders; and 33% of twelfth graders have been drunk during the last month; 12%, 22% and 26%, respectively, have used an illicit drug (NIDA, 1999 Monitoring the Future Study, Secondary Students).
- Among teenagers who binge drink, 39% say they drink alone; 58% drink when they are upset; 30% drink when they are bored; and 37% drink to feel high (OIG, HHS, "Drinking Habits, etc.").
- Junior/middle and senior high school students drink 35% of all wine coolers sold in the United States; they also consume 1.1 billion cans of beer (Ibid).
- 39% of college students have "binged" on alcohol during the past two weeks (NIDA, 1998 Monitoring the Future Study, College Students and Young Adults).
- Among college students in one survey, rates of binge drinking were highest among Caucasians, 43.3% for males and 24.4% for females; among African-Americans the rates were 24.8% for males and 5.4% for females; and among Asians, 32% for males and 20% for females ("Alcohol and Drugs on Virginia College Campuses," State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, 3/93, p. 11).
- Young adults ages 18-25 are most likely to binge or drink heavily. 54% of the drinkers in this age group binge and about one in four are heavy drinkers (NIDA, 1998 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse).

NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

- Drivers under the age of 25 were more likely than those 25 or older to be intoxicated in a fatal crash (CDC, "Alcohol-Related Traffic Fatalities Among Youth and Young Adults - United States, 1982-1989," MMWR, 3/91, p. 179).
- The prevalence of drinking and driving increases substantially among youth and young adults with the frequency of alcohol use and is strongly associated with binge drinking (CDC, "Update: Alcohol-Related Traffic Crashes and Fatalities Among Youth and Young Adults--United States, 1982-1994," MMWR, 12/95, p.872).
- Drivers ages 21-24 had the highest intoxication rates (27%) for fatal crashes in 1996 (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, "Traffic Safety Facts 1996").
- In 1995, 21.5% (262,112) of the clients admitted to alcohol or other drug treatment programs were under age 24, including 18,194 under age 15 (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Admissions to Substance Abuse Treatment Services, Advance Report No. 12, 2/97, p.30).
- A clear relationship exists between alcohol use and grade-point average among college students: students with GPAs of D or F drink three times as much as those who earn As (C Presley and P Meilman, "Alcohol and Drugs on American College Campuses," Student Health Program Wellness Center, Southern Illinois University, 7/92).
- 31.9% of youth under 18 in long-term, State-operated juvenile institutions in 1987 were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the arrest (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Survey of Youth in Custody, 1987. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, 9/88).
- Almost half of college students who were victims of campus crimes said they drinking or using other drugs when they were victimized (CR Bausell et al, "The Links Among Drugs, Alcohol and Campus Crime," Towson State University Center for Study and Prevention of Campus Violence, MD, 1990).
- Researchers estimate that alcohol use is implicated in one- to two-thirds of sexual assault and acquaintance or "date" rape cases among teens and college students (OIG, HHS, "Youth and Alcohol: Dangerous and Deadly Consequences," Washington, DC, 4/92).
- Among sexually active teens, those who average five or more drinks daily were nearly three times less likely to use condoms, thus placing them at greater risk for HIV infection. Among all teens who drink, 16% use condoms less often after drinking (RW Hingson, L Strunin, et al, "Beliefs About AIDS, Use of Alcohol and Drugs, and Uprotected Sex Among Massachusetts Adolescents." American Journal of Public Health, 3/90, p. 295-299).

ATTITUDES, PERCEPTIONS AND INFLUENCES

- 80% of teenagers don't know that a 12 oz. can of beer has the same amount of alcohol as a shot of whiskey; similarly, 55% don't know that a 5 oz. glass of wine and a 12 oz. can of beer have the same amount of alcohol (OIG, HHS, "Drinking Habits, etc.").
- 56% of students in grades 5 to 12 say that alcohol advertising encourages them to drink (The Scholastic/CNN Newsroom Survey on Student Attitudes About Drug and Substance Abuse, 2/90).
- 30% of children in grades four through six report that they have received "a lot" of pressure from their classmates to drink beer; 31% to try marijuana; and 34% to try cigarettes (The Weekly Reader National Survey on Drugs and Alcohol, Middletown, CT, Field Publications, Spring 1995).
- A survey of high school students found that 18% of females and 39% of males say it is acceptable for a boy to force sex if the girl is stoned or drunk (OIG, HHS, "Dangerous and Deadly Consequences").
- Teenagers whose parents talk to them regularly about the dangers of drugs are 42% less likely to use drugs than those whose parents don't, yet only 1 in 4 teens reports having these conversations (Partnership for a Drug-Free America news release, 4/26/99).

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Alcoholism and Alcohol-Related Problems

Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs Among Women

Alcohol-Related Birth Defects

Alcohol and Other Drugs in the Workplace